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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Operational Implications of Soviet Participation
in the International Maritime Satellite
Organization (INMARSAT)

1. Soviet interest in joining INMARSAT probably is motivated in the main by an interest in economically improving the USSR's capability to communicate with its merchant and fishing fleets. On an average day, there are at sea approximately 800 Soviet merchant ships--roughly half of them in the Atlantic--and nearly 700 Soviet fishing units which are scattered worldwide. Improved or redundant communications with these units would enable the USSR to better manage their operations. The Soviets have set up a "FLOT Automated Information Reference System" which uses a Minsk-22 computer to provide reports on the daily activity of their fishing fleet. Variants of this system probably could be adapted to the proposed INMARSAT program.

2. The Soviet Navy could derive some peripheral benefits from the USSR's participation in INMARSAT:

-- Improved control over civilian merchant ships and tankers could provide smoother logistic support to deployed naval units. Tankers and dry stores ships are regularly diverted from scheduled operations to provide afloat support to the navy. Soviet merchant tankers provide deployed combatants with over 50 percent of their fuel.

-- Soviet access to a commercial satellite communications system could improve the capabilities of Soviet merchant and fishing units to report

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their encounters with Western naval units. Soviet merchant ships frequently do report locations of major surface combatants and fishing units have this capability, although the practice has not been observed.

-- Soviet access to a data base providing the current locations of merchant ships world wide could improve the USSR's maritime reconnaissance capabilities by permitting them to "screen out" non-naval contacts and focus on high interest combatants.

3. There is scant likelihood that the Soviets would use a commercial satellite for military communications. Soviet command and control doctrine requires that a Soviet military service have complete control over all components of any dedicated military communications links. The international nature of INMARSAT would almost certainly preclude direct participation by any Soviet military service.

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